

IN MEMORIAM

Eva Gray



Eva Gray with granddaughter, Addie Gray.

Eva Wirth Gray died on March 5, 2011, at the age of 81, after a slow parting of ways with her long and rich life. Eva was an Assistant Professor in the Department of Mathematics from 1965 to 1995. Although she retired from her faculty position in 1995, she continued to work advising Master degree mathematics students for several years after her retirement.

Though Swiss by nationality, she was born in Ebbing, Germany, in 1929. She received a Ph.D. at the University of Zürich under the

direction of the great Finnish mathematician Rolf Nevanlinna, then taught for a time at a local school, but soon went to America to take a postdoctoral position at Stanford University in 1955. There, thanks to a squeaky office chair, she met her husband of 55 years, John Walker Gray.

By 1957 she was teaching mathematics at Douglas College while John was at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. They married in order to be able to live in married student housing without raising eyebrows: It was, after all, the 1950s. The couple moved to New York in 1959, Eva teaching at Barnard College and John at Columbia University. Barnard offered to make her a dean, but the University of Illinois offered something more: The chance for both of them to work together in the same department.

John and Eva arrived in 1962, intending like many new academic residents of Urbana to stay for a few years before moving on to bigger and better things. But this town has a way of growing on people, and they quickly began putting down roots in the form of Stephen, born 1962 near Hessel Park, Theodore, born 1964 on Ells Avenue, and Elizabeth, born 1966 on Michigan Avenue, where John and Eva stayed for the next 45 years.

The family traveled often to Switzerland, staying always in her father's great stone house on Sonnenberg Strasse, a place of many memories old and new. Elizabeth died there in the Children's Hospital of Zürich at the age of 15, after a short lifetime of wondering if she would make it another year.

Eva's grandchildren Addie, Emma, and Connor were a great joy to her as they grew from infants to the vibrant creatures they are today, no doubt bringing back memories of her own children.

Eva lived through, and lived in, a world alive with danger and hope, love and fear, tragedy and rebirth. Through it all she remained kind to all around her, gentle to a fault, and as solid as the mother earth she now returns to.